

Local businesses may be months away from going under

Hackney businesses warn they could face closure as the government ramps up rates

Matt Robinson and Nathan Bleaken

SMALL business owners will be forced to shell out up £1,000 extra over the next 12 months as higher business rates come into force for the new financial year.

The increasing rates, in addition to other hidden charges, have caused a number of businesses in the borough to question their future.

One business owner said he was just “a couple of bad months” away from closure with another expressing concern he will be unable to pay his rates on time.

The concerns come as local businesses are being hit by an increase of up to 50 per cent in their rates compared to the 2008-09 financial year.

Out of the 10 business surveyed by the *Hackney Post*, six claimed they are struggling to survive as their costs continue to rise.

The news has sparked anger within business owners claiming that there is no justification for the spiralling costs because they have not seen any additional support being offered by the council to help them through the economic downturn.

Although the rates, which start on April 1, are imposed by central government and are standardised across England, they are used to pay for local services provided by the council.

Andrew Allcock, 54, has owned the Car Hospital garage in Cricketfield Road for 15 years, but says that

although business rates continue to rise, the council is yet to provide the support he needs.

Having worked with local schools in the community as well as running a free child seat fitting service with the council, Mr Allcock is angry at the lack of support.

“After all the work I have done within the community I feel it is unfair that the council is not helping me to keep my business going in these difficult times.

“I just got my rates bill in, I don’t know how I am going to pay it. Who knows if I’ll still be here in a year. The council just stick their hands out for money but they don’t want to help and prices just keep going up.

“Yes we’re in a credit crunch, but who is it affecting? The small people. I’d like to see the politicians start doing something constructive to help my business.”

Neighbouring pub The Three Sisters is also feeling the pressure.

Landlord Tony Attile, 43, said: “We are just a couple of bad months away from closure.

“The council is like the mafia, there is no support. When we were behind with our payments they sent a guy round in a leather jacket, he looked like a henchman.”

The increasing rates have also hit businesses in the Mare Street area, compounding difficulties of spiralling wholesale prices.

Ali Gultekin, owner of the Istanbul Supermarket, said: “I can’t afford an annual holiday any more.

“I have to be open every day to ensure that I sell enough to sustain my profit. With sales falling, I am



From left, local business owners Tony Attile, Andy Carlambous and Andrew Allcock

concerned about the future, therefore I have had to cut costs wherever I can.”

Sarah Southerton, a spokesperson for the Communities and Local Government Office, defended the rising rates. She said that to freeze them at the current level would cost the UK economy nearly £1bn.

She said: “Business rates are adjusted each year to take account of inflation in September. This is a consistent approach since the introduction of national business rates in 1990.

“We recognise the problems that many businesses are facing in these testing times - that’s why we have taken action to give broad support, including free business health

checks, skills training and an aim to pay Government suppliers within 10 days.”

Andy Charlambous, 39, who runs the Amhurst Cafe in Amhurst Road, has also not seen any support despite the increasing costs.

“The council are only interested in taking your money,” he said.

“They don’t consult anyone, the send you a letter but they don’t come round and talk to you and take what you have to say into account.”

Mr Charlambous said the increasing rates were preventing his 70-year-old father from retiring because he is unable to live on his £80 a week pension.

The news comes a week after businesses in Amhurst Road were

told they were to face increasing commercial waste charges following the removal of their street-side bins.

The new scheme, which comes into effect at the end of the month, marks an early suspension of the six month trial period introduced in January.

Under the changes the weekly collection has been scrapped in favour of daily collections. This is expected to cost businesses an extra £800 a year.

A spokesperson for Hackney Council refused to comment on the lack of support offered to small businesses. He added that they have no control over the rates dictated by central government.

Bra fitters not feeling the pinch

Katy Barnato

SOME women binge on chocolates. Others watch hours of chick flicks. But in North Hackney, women are beating the credit-crunch blues by stocking up on brand name bras.

“Ladies still want a treat,” says Rosanne Berry, owner of independent lingerie and bra shop Rosa, on Stoke Newington Church Street. “A lot of customers are fed up with everything, and want a bit of spoiling.”

While most high street shops have experienced declining revenues over the last six months,

Rosa’s sales have remained robust. “We do have slow days,” admits Rosanne, “but we haven’t noticed any real fall in demand”. The secret, Rosanne reveals, is her enthusiasm for the product: “I love selling bras. I get such a pleasure from it.”

But Rosanne’s zeal isn’t just for top brass bras. Although all the bras are designer, prices start at an unalarming £18 and go up to a scarier £75. Brands include Triumph, Calvin Klein and Rosanne’s personal favourite, Aubarde. All sizes are catered for too, from 28AA to 50K: “Bigger customers might be disappointed elsewhere.”

Rosa’s real selling point, how-

ever, is its expert fitting service. While larger stores like Marks and Spencer generally offer some form of fitting, perfectly sized bras are a consuming passion at Rosa.

“It’s crucial to be fitted properly,” says Rosanne. If not, women can end up with stretch marks and drooping cleavage. And “once your breasts have dropped they won’t go back up again,” she warns.

Expertise such as this comes after years of toil. Rosanne has owned the small shop for more than 13 years, but had worked in the underwear business previously as well. The shop itself was established 70 years ago in 1939, originally specialising in corsets.

Rosa’s position as a Hackney institution is reaping rewards as recession creeps on.

“We have regulars in all the time. A lot of people are staying local, instead of going into town, because they want to stay loyal to local businesses. And they don’t want to be tempted into buying things they don’t need; we’re not into pressuring people here,” says Rosanne.

In fact with its emphasis on pitch-perfect fit above sales, Rosa may be the perfect shop for Stoke Newingtonians feeling the pinch.

Rosa, 3 Stoke Newington Church St, N16. Tel: 020 7254 3467



Rosanne Berry and assistant Faye Graham are a perfect pair

Credit Crunch Lunch

The *Hackney Post* set out to find the best places to get a great value for money lunch across the borough

Ruby’s

Kingsland Road - Dalston
Hot vegetable soup - Daily - £1.99
(Other varieties available daily)

Britannia Restuarant

Mare Street - Hackney Central
One piece of chicken, medium fries and two hot wings - £2

Baxter’s Court, Wetherspoons

Mare Street - Hackney Central
Monday Special - Beer and Burger - £3.99

“

What our readers said on 

@hackneye The Kashmiri hole-in-the-wall in Ridley Road market (from Kingsland, about 5 units down on left) is the best cheap lunch in Ldn

@andanotherthing lunchtime meal deal at Huong Viet

@martyj21 leo's on kingsland road, close to junction with shacklewell lane, i used to work near there, from fry ups to roast dinners

”

described how the increasing charges are an added blow to his family business of 40 years which have prevented his 70 year old father from retiring as he is unable to survive on his £80 a week pension. "

Hackney Council declined to comment.

The news comes a week after businesses in Amhurst Road were told they were to face increasing commercial waste charges following the removal of their streetside bins.

The new scheme which starts next week marks an early suspension of the sixth month trial period introduced in January .

Under the changes which the weekly collection charge has scrapped in favour of daily collections at a cost to business of £1.83 per sack.

Andy Charlambous, 39, owner of the Amhurst Cafe used to pay £142.74 a quarter for weekly waste collection but under the changes is expecting to pay daily charges totalling £332.80 a quarter.

Mr Charlambous said the changes were outrageous and another sign of how the council is continually taking money from local businesses without

Caption in here